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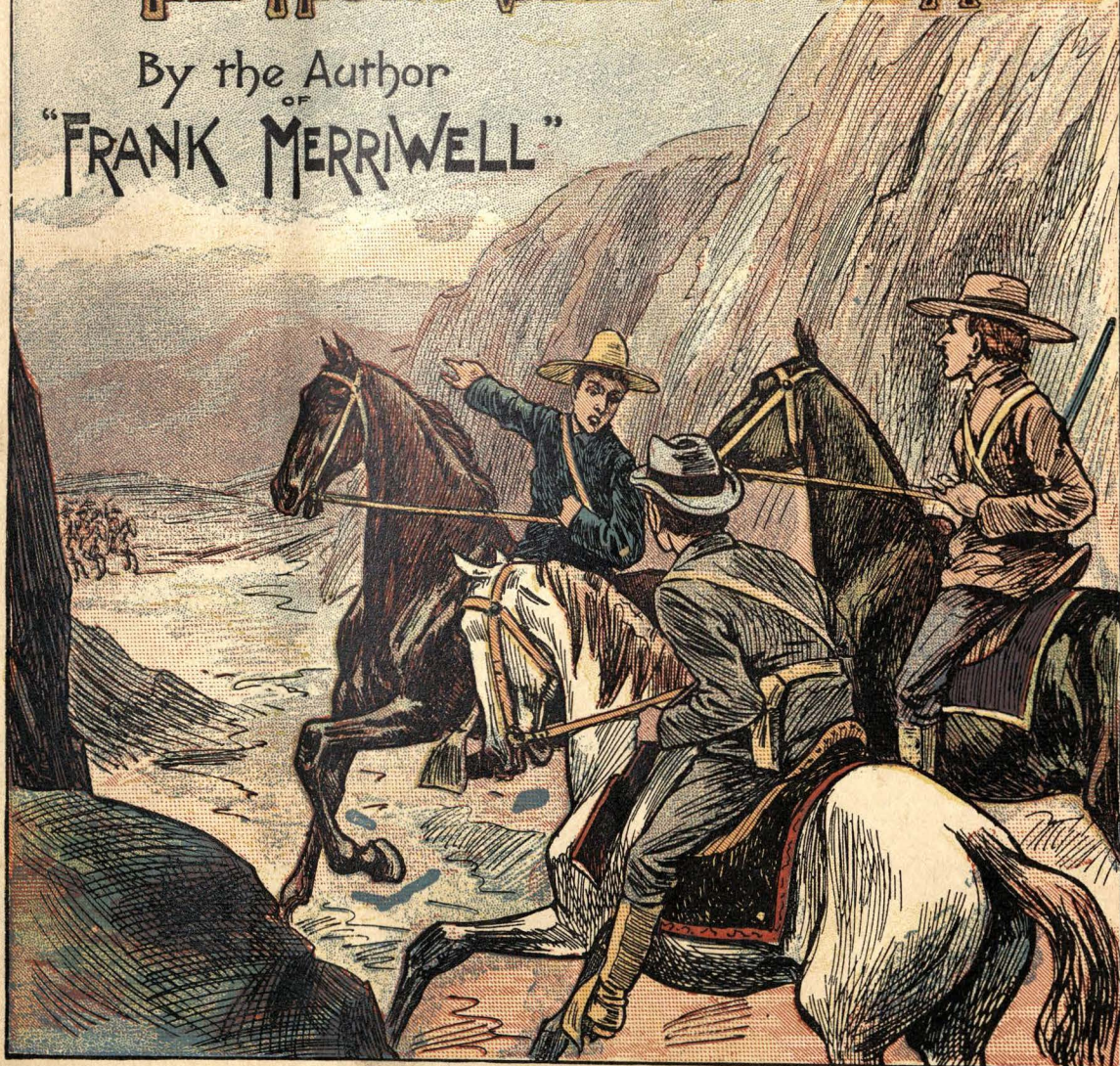
October 3, 1896.

Vol. I. No. 25.

Price Five Cents.

## FRANK MERRIWELL'S MISSION OR THE MYSTIC VALLEY OF THE ANDES

By the Author  
OF  
"FRANK MERRIWELL"



"IT IS BLACK MIGUEL AND HIS BAND," CRIED JUAN IN TERROR. "THEY COME TO KILL US."



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## FRANK MERRIWELL'S MISSION; OR, The Mystic Valley of the Andes.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### FRANK FINDS A MISSION.

Bump—thud!

One boy had been walking, the other running. They collided at the corner of Bush and Battery streets, San Francisco, and both fell heavily.

"All down; set 'em on t'other alley!"

"Beg-a de pardon, senior. Very great-a mistake! Beg-a de pardon very much!"

"Let up! What are you begging my pardon for, old man? I am the one to beg pardon. You were walking—I running—came to corner—didn't look—biff!—here we are."

The speaker laughed. It was a jolly, free-and-easy, reassuring boy's laugh. The other lad had a sad, dusky face, with big, dark eyes that seemed filled with a haunted fear. His appearance and his language showed he was not a native of the United States.

The boy who had been running jumped up.

"Here you go, old man," he cried, catching the other by the hand and drawing him to his feet.

"Unfortunate blunder. Very sorry. In a hurry. Must catch a train."

He flashed out a handsome watch and

glanced at it, whistled softly, then asked: "How far is it to the Townsend street railway station?"

"I cannot tell, senior," was the respectful reply, although the words seemed to be uttered in a bewildered way. "I do not know what place dis is at all."

"Hum! So? Why, this is Bush street, this is Battery, and that is Market, over there."

"No, no! I mean I do not know what citee dis is."

"How? Come again! Don't know what city this is? Say, what have you been up against, old man?"

"I speak de trute, senior," was the humble, almost cringing, protest. "I know not why I be here—I know not where I be."

"Whew!" whistled the American lad, beginning to look the other boy over with keen interest. "Off your trolley, eh? Why, this is San Francisco, in the State of California, which is one of the most magnificent gems in that glorious, scintillating collection known as the United States of America. Are you on?"

The dark-eyed lad looked still more bewildered by this spread-eagle manner of delivering information.



"De United States?" he murmured.  
 "I think I must be dere."

"What? Didn't even know you were in the United States? Well, are you sure you're on earth? Jupiter! but you interest me!—Wonder if I can catch that train now?"—Again glancing at his watch.—"Don't look that way from the road. Let her go. Will have to wire professor again. 'Missed train. Did not start. Try again to-morrow.' How'll that go?"

"I do not know what you talk-a about, senior."

"Of course you don't; stupid of me. I'll introduce myself. I am Frank Merriwell, a traveler by profession just at present. I had a rich uncle—queer old fellow—who died and left me a fortune. In his will he provided that, in order that I might increase my knowledge of the world, and broaden my ideas, I should travel. I have been doing so, in company with my guardian, Professor Orman Tyler Scotch, generally known as 'Hot Scotch,' and some companions. Companions went home; professor was called East on urgent business. I wouldn't go until I had seen San Francisco. Ready to start to-day; sent all my luggage to station, then ran over to view Chinatown once more. Took too much time about it, and was sprinting for a cab when I collided with you. There you have it in a nutshell. Now, let drive at me. I am curious to know how it happens you don't know where you are at."

"Can I trust-a you?"

"I think so; but I may be somewhat stuck on myself."

"I think I can. You have-a de good face. But I have been fool so many time. I tell you de story. It is long."

"That so? Then we won't stand here. Where'll we go? You look hungry."

"Si, senior; have not eat in long time."

"Well, we'll fix that. Wonder where the nearest restaurant is? Must be one

close at hand on Market street. Come along."

"Si, senior."

"Don't 'Si, senior' me any more, please. I am no more than a year older than you. My name is Frank Merriwell. Call me Frank. What's your handle?"

"Handale? I do not understand."

"Oh, that's a Western expression that I have picked up. I mean to ask your name."

"Matias—Juan Matias."

"Good! You'll be Juan; I'll be Frank. That goes. Now for something to eat."

A few minutes later the two lads, who had thus strangely met, were seated in a restaurant, and Frank had ordered a square meal for Juan, which was quickly served. The boy with the dark eyes began eating in a way that showed he was extremely hungry, although he did everything with a refinement and grace of manner that told his breeding had been of the best.

When Juan's appetite was well satisfied Frank said:

"Now, partner, for your story. You said it was long. Cut it short as possible—condense it. We Yankees believe in condensations. You're Spanish?"

"My father was—or is—a Spaniard."

"Was or is? What do you mean by that?"

"Alas! Senior Frank, I know not if my father be living or dead."

"Drop the senior; I'm Frank. Here's a mystery! I love mysteries. Get after that yarn, Juan."

"As you say. I will make is short. My father was born in Spain, of noble ancestors. You see I speak good English when I am not excited. You wonder? I will explain. My mother was an English lady. He met her in Paris, while traveling. She was also traveling. He saw her, admired her, sought her to be properly presented, and was fortunate in obtaining an introduction. He loved her, and she



loved him at first sight. But there were difficulties in the way of a marriage—difficulties on both sides. He told her of Spain. A year later they met in Madrid. They had not lost track of each other in all that year. In Madrid my mother also met the Marques de la Villa de Villar de la Aguila. He loved my mother likewise. My father and the Marques quarreled; they fought a duel. My father think he have killed the marques, and he fly from Spain, where next he go to Chili. The marques does not die, but he hate my father. Fate bring my father and my mother together again, and they be married. One year later my sistare is born; then, in another year, I am born. In Chili my father come to be a great man. He have power and influence in politics, and he grow to be rich. Fifteen years he live in Chili—Santiago, Valparaiso and other places.. Then the Marques de la Villa del——”

“Cut is short, Juan; give us his last name.”

“The Marques Aguila come to Chili and find my father. He plot against my father. The revolutionary war—it come, and my father he in it. When it is over my father have to fly for his life, and to leave everything. The marques pursues to capture—to keel-a my father. But my father he escape. We live hid in de mountains. But always we fear de marques, for he be rich-a and powerful. In de mountains be de bandits. Black Miguel lead-a dem. De marques offer Black Miguel de pardone if he will capture my father. Ha! what you think of dat?”

“I think your father was in a bad box. Couldn't he get out of the country?”

“I tell you,” explained Juan, excitedly. “My mother have grow ill—my sweet mother! Father have my sistare and myself, wid my mother. We try to go over de mountains to Mendoza. My mother be weak, and de mountain sickness take her high upon de mountain. She be faint—

she fall from de saddle! Den she bleed-a at de nose! My father know to save her we must go back. Dat we have to do, and we live in the valley again. My mother—my sweet mother!—she get worse and worse, and den she die! Oh, senor—oh, Frank, dere we bury her! Den my father do not want to go away. He stay by her grave, all his life gone wid her.”

The tears were running down Juan's face, and his chin was quivering. Frank turned away and coughed, which gave him an excuse for producing his handkerchief.

For some minutes there was silence, and then the low, musical voice of Juan began again:

“I make it short, now, Frank. Dere we stay and stay. My sistare be beautiful—she look like my mother when my mother is a little girl. We live some way—any way. I always fear Black Miguel find us, but my father seem to have lost fear and care. Then—Frank—then my father he disappear.”

“Disappears?”

“We never know-a where he go—we never know what become of-a him. Pepita, my sistare, and I go everywhere—we hunt, search, but do not find-a him.”

“What next, Juan—what next?”

“My sistare!” cried the Spanish lad, clasping his hands—“one day she disappear, too! Oh, I be crazee! I wander in de mountain, calling all de time, ‘Pepita, Pepita, Pepita!’ Sometime I think-a I hear her ansare. I listen. It be de wind in de rocks. One time some way, I find myself in a strange valley, near to de blind valley of Cerillos. I cannot get out; I do not know how I come-a dere. I be sick, faint, hungree. I think I must die there. I call-a to Pepita. Den, senor—den, Frank,” cried Juan, rising to his feet, his face working with excitement, “I hear her ansare somewhere—somewhere in de air! I cannot see her; I see



a big-a back hole far up in de rock. I look away. When I look again, I see dat hole no more! It be gone! Den I get crazee! Next I know, many men be round me. Dey must be de men of Black Miguel. I be seize, tied, blindfold! I struggle-a, but no use. Dey feed me, dey carry me away, dey put me on a horse, we travel many day. Den we be at the sea. I am put on a ship, kept in de dark-a, oh, so long—so long! And den, in the night, I be brought to de land, and left. I find myself in strange place where de English is spoke-a. I walk-a, walk-a. I am afraid; I speak to nobody. Den you run to me, and we fall down. You know the rest."

Frank Merriwell's eyes were blazing with excitement. Neither lad heeded that many eyes were on them.

"Juan," cried Frank, "you have been wronged! With the aid of Providence, your wrong shall be righted!"

"Oh, Frank, I fear never! And my poor little sistare! Look, Frank," taking a locket from his bosom and opening it for the other lad to see, "dis is her picture. Oh, where is she now?"

It was the sweet, innocent face of a girl of sixteen at which Frank Merriwell gazed, and he felt his chivalrous nature stirred to the depths. There was a tender pleading in the pictured eyes that he could not resist.

"Juan, we will find where she is—we will rescue her!"

"How?"

"By going to her! I have money enough, Juan, and I am not going East. I shall send a message to Professor Scotch immediately, and together, you and I, will take the first steamship for Valparaiso."

"Oh, my good friend, is dat possible?"

"It is possible, and it shall be! It shall be my mission to solve this mystery, to learn your father's fate, to save your sister! Juan, your hand! We are partners

on the box seat—partners till the mission is ended!"

Their hands met in the clasp of undying friendship.

## CHAPTER II.

### OLD FRIENDS MEET.

Toward sunset of a beautiful day the steamer California, cleared from San Francisco, dropped anchor in the harbor of Valparaiso.

On the forward deck two lads, Frank Merriwell and Juan Matias, were gazing at the picturesque city that rose on the slope beyond the quay, with the purple mountains, the mighty Andes, making a background in the remote distance.

"Hurrah, Juan!" cried Frank, in his impulsive way, "we are here!"

"Yes, Frank."

"Why, what's the matter with you? You say that as if your heart were heavy with fear."

"So it is. Ah, Frank, something tell me we soon be in great danger."

"Danger be hanged! You should be happy to get back—happy at the prospect of soon finding your father and sister."

"But I fear we can never find them, and I fear——"

"Get out with your fears! We will find them! I have made it my mission. Come, cheer up. How do we get ashore?"

"See the little boats coming off to us, Frank. They will set us ashore."

It was nearly an hour later, however, before arrangements had been made so that they were taken upon one of those boats.

Before long, each with a leather grip in hand, they were hastening to find a hotel in Valparaiso.

It was the hour when there was the most life and movement in the city, and, in many ways, the scenes reminded Frank of those he had beheld in Mexico.

Throngs of people, in red, orange and



blue, strolled everywhere. The greater part of the women wore rebozas and scarlet sashes, although, to break the harmony of all this, Parisian gowns and bonnets were in evidence. There were men wearing vermilion serapes about their shoulders, with wide hats of felt trimmed with silver, and breeches of pink buckskin, held together down the sides with silver buttons. But there were other men in English coats and trousers, with silk hats and Picadilly shoes. Some even twirled their canes, and walked in imitation of English swells.

On the streets were donkeys piled high with sacks of silver ore, or carrying great jars of water. Spirited horses dashed along the streets, ridden by men who sat in the saddles as if they were a part of the animal. Soldiers were to be seen at frequent intervals, and, as in Mexico, the peon was on every hand.

Suddenly Juan grasped Frank's hand and drew him quickly round a corner, panting:

"Queek—we must run!"

"Run? What for?"

"One of Black Miguel's men—Bengo—a spy, a wretch!—have seen me!"

Juan fled, and Frank followed till he could overtake and stop the frightened lad.

"Be sensible, Juan. It is not likely this Bengo recognized you. You are dressed now like a native of the United States."

"That attracts his attention!" palpitated the frightened boy. "He look-a at us both sharp-a. I be sure he know-a us."

After some time Frank succeeded in calming Juan, and they proceeded.

But another adventure awaited them before they reached the hotel.

Juan sought secluded streets and dark ways. Suddenly they were startled by the sound of voices that came from a little group of dusky figures. One of these figures was standing with his back against the wall of a building; the others surrounded him in a half-circle. The one

with his back against the wall was saying:

"Wal, gol ding your picters! I knowed you was follerin' me for something that wasn't no good. So you want my purse?"

"Si senior," bowed one who seemed to be the leader. "You geeve-a us dat, we do not hurt-a you."

"Haow kind! I s'pose yeou kin see this ere revolver I've got? Wal, she's loaded by gum! an' ef yeou don't git aout mighty dad-bimmed lively she'll commence to shoot, by thutter! an' I won't hold myself responsible ef some of yeou fellers git hurt, by ginger!"

In a moment Frank Merriwell sprang forward, shouting:

"That's right, Ephraim! give it to 'em! I'm with you!"

Smack! smack!

Frank struck two blows, and two of the ruffians went down. The others took to their heels instantly, and the ones who had been struck scrambled up and followed, all quickly disappearing.

Then Frank turned to the person who had been trapped by the band. Out went his hand, and he cried:

"Ephraim Gallup, of Vermont! I'd quicker thought of seeing a being from Mars!"

The other, who was a tall, lank, awkward boy, somewhat older than Frank, gasped and staggered.

"Frank Merriwell!" he roared. "Frank Merriwell who was at skule with me at Fardale! Jumpin' jee-whiz! kin this ere be possible!"

"I reckon it is," laughed Frank, as he grasped the hand of the Yankee lad. "Come, let's get out of this; it's dangerous here. We'll find a hotel, and we can explain everything to each other's satisfaction there."

Juan proved valuable now, for he conducted them to a good hotel, at which he did all the business of securing accommodations.



To Frank and Ephraim the exterior of the hotel did not seem at all inviting, for it was a one-story adobe building; but, once inside, they were surprised and delighted to find a series of courtyards, or patios, avenues of trellised vines, aviaries, canalized watercourses, and other pleasant features. Here and there fountains played and the colored lights from swinging lamps made the place seem like fairyland to the ship-weary lads.

The boys ate supper in the open air, near one of the tinkling fountains.

"Jove!" exclaimed Frank. "This is great! Now, Ephraim, old man, just explain how it happens that you are here."

"Whut, talk an' eat at ther same time! Got-dinged ef I kin do it. Jest you wait till I fill my sack some, an' then I'll tell ye all about it."

So they waited, and, finally, when the country boy had satisfied his ravenous appetite to a certain extent, he leaned back in his chair and asked:

"Ju ever hear me speak uv my brother Hiram, Frank?"

"I believe I have," nodded Merriwell.

"Wal, it's like this: Hi, he's a danged smart feller, and he knows haow ter make money an' keep it. When he gits holt of a silver dollar he squeezes it so gol derned hard it makes ther eagle squawk. All ther same, he never wus ther kind ter stay to hum an' be satisfied. He wuz alwus lookin' out fer ther best place ter make a dollar, an' a friend of ourn got him ter come ter Chili. Marm, she didn't want him ter come 'way aout here, but he would do it, an' he done it. Wal, he's bin luckier than a barrel uv apple-sass—made money hand over fist ever sense he's bin here, by gum!"

"And so you thought you would come here, eh?"

"Hi sent fer me—said as haow he'd put me in ther way of gittin' rich. Marm she didn't want me to come no more'n

she wanted Hi to, but dad he said it wuz all gol dern foolishness, an' I come."

"But you were at school in Pardale. How did you happen to leave school?"

"Too much fol-de-rol business there. Ef a feller didn't mind his pucker all the time he got the old scratch. I couldn't stand it, an' so I jest got aout. Hi sent money ter pay my passage daown here."

"Where is your brother?"

"Spected to meet him soon's I got here, but business tuck him orf inter the maountings, an' he left word fer me ter stay right here till he got back."

"Well, I am more than glad to see you again, Ephraim; but I never expected to meet you down here in South America."

"Wal, you kin bet I was gol derned glad to see yeou when ye found me standin' orf them fellers what wanted to rob me, dad-bim um! An' I never s'pected ter see yeou down here, though I knowed ye was travelin' round. Jest you kinder explain haow it is yeou are here."

So Frank quickly explained how he came to be in Valparaiso, and Ephraim listened with intense interest. The tale of Juan's woes aroused the warm-hearted Yankee lad, and, at the end, he asked:

"Be yeou fellers goin' right on inter the maountings?"

"You bet!" replied Frank. "We go on to-morrow. No time is to be lost."

Ephraim meditated some minutes, and then cried:

"By gum I'm goin' with ye!"

"What's that? You going?"

"That ere's jest what I be, by jinks! Hiram won't be back here fer ten days, an' I might jest as well be doin' somethin'. Yeou may hev ter fight some, an' yeou know I kin hold up my end, by thutter!"

"You are just the fellow we want," declared Frank, with satisfaction. "Juan, we'll take him into the combine. This is to be a three-cornered partnership, and here's luck to it."



## CHAPTER III.

## TRAPPED IN THE MOUNTAINS.

Frank was well pleased to have Ephraim accompany them, and the following morning found the little party on the way by rail to Santa Rosa.

With the exception of their horses, they were thoroughly armed and equipped.

It made Frank feel quite at home to find himself traveling on a passenger car that had been manufactured in Wilmington, Delaware.

It happened that on this train there did not seem to be one of the brigandish men with blue-black beards, such as Frank had expected to see everywhere in Chili.

The men and women chatted with a certain refreshing freeness. The men were stylishly dressed, to a great extent, and many of the women wore Parisian bonnets.

Frank was disappointed. He had expected to see much in the dress and manners of the people that was distinctive and characteristic. He expressed his disappointment to Juan, who said:

"It is in the poor people you will see what you look for. They wear the poncho and the manta. Rich people they like to do like the English or the French. They seem 'shamed to dress like the people of the country where they do belong."

He then called Frank's attention to a pretty girl who was wearing the manta. The girl was sitting near an open window, and Frank watched her some minutes, finally deciding that the manta was decidedly becoming. It is always black, and, in this case, was made of fine material. The folds around the face of the girl were arranged with a certain piquancy, the shape of the coiffure being shown, while a fascinating curl was allowed to escape, apparently by accident. The girl also had a charming way of readjusting the folds of the shawl, which was thrown over the left shoulder.

When Frank had tired of watching the girl he looked out at the landscape, but this, also, became tiresome after a little. Then he turned to Juan.

"We shall leave the railroad at Santa Rosa?"

"Si."

"We must obtain horses there?"

The Spanish lad nodded.

"Do you think we'll be able to get them without trouble?"

"If the money be ready to pay."

"Well, I have enough for that. I rather think I have enough to last till we get back to Valparaiso. Last night I wrote a letter to my guardian, and he will forward funds as soon as he receives it."

"I know a man in Santa Rosa who will get us the horses," said Juan. "He be a friend of my father, but he keep it quiet. He is Don Honorio Rosende, who have made the quickest time any one ever made over the mountains between Santa Rosa and Mendoza. He do it in thirty-six hour and kill two horses. That way he save his brother, who was captured by Indians."

"Well, we will call on Don Honorio."

"That's jest what we'll do, by gum! We want some gol derned good hosses, too."

"The best we can obtain."

Santa Rosa was reached, and the boys went straight to the Hotel del Comercio, where they obtained accommodations and made inquiries concerning Don Rosende.

It happened that the don had been away at Santiago, on business, but was expected to return that evening. The boys held a consultation, and decided it was best to wait for his appearance.

After a swimming bath in the hotel, which delighted and refreshed the lads, they walked out to view the town.

Santa Rosa they found surrounded by snow-capped mountains, rising in blue mystery on every hand. To the west the



main ridge of the Andes flung itself high into the sky.

"Which way do we go from here?" asked Frank.

"That way," answered Juan, waving his hand toward the northwest.

"I be gol dinged ef I see haow in thutteration we're goin' that air way," said Ephraim. "We can't git no hosses that kin jump over them hills."

"We will find a pass through them," exclaimed Juan.

"Dad bimmed ef I kin see where!"

"It be not easy to see from here, but I find it. You trust me."

"All right, Wand. I ruther guess you know your business, an' we'll stick by yeou closer then flies stick ter ther bung-hole uv a 'larses barrel."

Santa Rosa proved to be like nearly all Chilian towns. The streets were laid out rectangularly, dividing the place into squares like a checkerboard. With very few exceptions, the houses were one-story in height, built of sun-dried bricks, with grayish-tiled roofs, and stuccoed walls, colored rose, yellow, blue and other shades.

The streets were ankle deep in dust. Open channels of water flowed along the sides of the streets. The sidewalks were paved with round pebbles.

The boys visited the plaza, or public square, where there were many benches, and where they found a few citizens lingering in the grateful shadows of the trees.

In Santa Rosa ponchos were plentiful. The poncho is a blanket with a hole cut in the middle. The wearer slips his head through the hole, allowing the blanket to hang from his shoulders.

Here many of the people wore wide-brimmed white straw hats, held on by black strings, tied beneath the chin.

"Never saw folks dress in sech gol-dern outrageous styles," declared Ephraim. "It jest beats all natur!"

It did not take the lads long to feel

that they had seen all of Santa Rosa they desired, and Frank and Ephraim returned to the hotel.

Juan, however, sought some of his father's friends whom he could trust.

Frank and Ephraim went out into one of the hotel's patios, where they found two hammocks strung beneath an arbor of vines, and there they remained, chatting till they fell asleep.

Frank was awakened by feeling himself violently shaken by Juan.

"What's the matter?" he asked, as he sat up.

"We must get away from here ver' quick-a!" panted the Spanish lad. "We must not stop a here."

"Jupiter! you are pale, and you seem all broken up. Have you seen a ghost?"

"No; but I have seen something worse."

"What?"

"Bengo."

"Who is Bengo?"

"He is de vera bad cut-a-throat—spy—one devil!"

"But why should we run away from him? He is not likely to molest us, is he?"

"Si, Frank."

"Why should he?"

"He belong to Black Miguel's band-a."

"And Black Miguel is the outlaw you fear so much—the one who was offered a pardon if he would capture your father?"

"Si, Frank."

"Well, it is not at all likely this Bengo knew you, Juan."

"Ah, he did! I see it when he look-a at me. I tell you what I t'ink, Frank."

"Go ahead."

"I t'ink he be set to watch-a us. It'ink he follow us everywhere. We not get away from him so easy."

"Oh, I don't know about that. I am inclined to believe you are frightened over nothing."

"Wait!" cried Juan, desperately. "You see! You find I know-a something."

"Gol dinged ef I don't think it'd be a



good plan ter git aout uv taown kinder lively an' quiet like," said Ephraim, who had been listening. "It might be a darned sight better fer ther general state uv aour health."

So they talked the matter over, and decided that, if they could obtain the horses, they would slip out of Santa Rosa quietly that very night.

Don Rosende returned, and they had no difficulty in obtaining three horses, for which Frank paid.

Late that evening they rode out of Santa Rosa, and, with Juan as guide, headed to the northwest.

For two days they journeyed into the mountains, and during all that time Juan was certain they were followed.

At length they found themselves in a long, narrow valley—a valley that was almost a ravine.

Juan seemed to have lost his bearings for the time, and they finally came to the end of the valley, which closed in an impassable wall of bare black rock.

"It is the blind valley of Cerillos!" cried Juan. "I know where we be now. We can go no farther; we must turn back."

Turn back they did, but, at that very moment, far down the valley, a band of horsemen came into view, and rode straight toward the three lads.

Wild-looking ruffians they were, with bright-colored serapes and blue-black beards. They were armed with rifles, revolvers, knives and machetes, on which the sunlight glinted, and they set up a wild cry as they saw the three boys.

At the head of the band rode a dark-faced, fierce-looking man, mounted on a coal-black horse.

"It is Black Miguel and his band-a!" cried Juan, in terror. "I know we be followed! They have us in de trap! They come to kill-a us! We will all be murdare!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### THROUGH THE GAP.

The Chilian lad was so overcome with terror that he nearly fell from his horse.

Frank and Ephraim were surprised, but they did not become frightened and lose their wits.

"Darn my pumpkins, ef this don't look like trouble!" drawled the Vermonter, as he quickly unslung his rifle from his back. "Never used this air kind uv a gun much, but I uster do a darn good job with dad's ole muzzle-loadin' army musket when I was to hum. Ef I kin git onter ther way this thing jeogeries, I may be able to hit the side uv a haouse or some-thin'."

"Come on!" cried Frank. "Remember the gap we passed back a short distance. We must reach it ahead of them, and ride into it."

"Won't it be a trap?"

"No more than this is, for we have no shelter here, and we are hemmed in. If we get into the gap, those fellows will have to ride in after us one at a time, and we can shoot them as fast as they come."

"Go ahead! We're with ye, by gum!"

"Come on, Juan!"

Frank had also unslung his rifle, and the three lads now charged straight toward the oncoming bandits. Juan did not urge his horse into the charge, but the creature kept with the others.

The two American boys flourished their rifles above their heads, uttering a great shout of defiance.

"Come on, you cut-throats!" cried Frank, defiantly. "We'll make it interesting for you!"

"Come on, yeou gol dern dirty-mugged sons-uv-guns!" yelled Ephraim. "We'll give ye hot-shot an' Hail Columbia! We'll give yer a taste uv Yankee lead, ye p'izen sarnips!"

To the bandits it must have seemed that the three lads were fierce for a fight,



for the trio rode at the outlaws as if they were utterly reckless and devoid of fear.

Black Miguel was seen to fling his horse upon its haunches and make a gesture that brought his followers to a halt.

"They ain't goin' ter run, be they?" nervously asked Ephraim, with a queer laugh.

"What's the matter?" asked Frank.

"Are you afraid you will not get a crack at them?"

"Oh, that don't worry me a great deal."

"They think we're going to charge them, and so——"

"They're gittin' red dy for us. Where is that gap?"

"Almost half way to where they have halted. See it there on the right."

"It's a gol dern good thing they stopped."

"That's right."

"Ef they hadn't we couldn't got to it."

"No."

"Naow——"

"Get ready to take a flying shot at them as we whirl into the gap. You go in first, and let Juan follow. I will come behind, and I'll make it hot for them if they crowd us."

By this time they were close upon the gap and very near to the bandits. The latter were waiting, with some doubt, for the boys to get yet nearer, holding their weapons ready for use.

"Ready!" hissed Frank.

The two lads flung up their rifles.

"Fire!"

The weapons spoke.

"Hooray!" bellowed Ephraim, in delight. "That air's ther way ter give 'em hot shot an' Hail Columby!"

One of the outlaws had flung up his arms and pitched from the saddle to the ground, while the horse of another had dropped instantly.

For the moment the bandits were flung into consternation.

"To the right!" cried Frank, clearly. "Here is the gap!"

To the right the lads wheeled.

A yell came from the lips of the bandits.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Frank. "They have just tumbled to the trick. Bend low. There'll be bullets in the air in a moment."

Forward the boys bent upon the necks of their horses, and then a rattling volley of shots came from the outlaws, while bullets whistled all about the lads.

"Never touched me, by gum!" chuckled Ephraim, who seemed to have absorbed some of Frank's reckless spirit.

"Give it to them once more!" panted Merriwell.

They were close to the gap, which seemed like a long, narrow crack in the face of the rocky wall. Before dashing into it, Frank and Ephraim whirled and fired again.

There was no time to note the effect of these final shots, for the horses required instant attention.

As they dashed into the gap, bullets were chipping off bits of rock and sending down pebbles and dust from the face of the wall.

In they went, one after the other, and not one of them all had been touched by a bit of lead.

"Well, that's dead lucky!" exclaimed Frank, when he had asked them if they were hurt, and they had told him they were not. "Those fellows cannot be good marksmen, or they were rattled."

"Shall I keep on goin' as fur as I kin?" asked the Yankee boy.

"Sure; keep right ahead till you have to stop."

The gap was strewn with boulders, and it zag-zagged so they could not ride swiftly, but still they made pretty good time, dashing recklessly along.

Behind them the bandits were uttering



wild cries, and the sounds indicated the rascals were in pursuit.

Frank wondered where the gap would lead, and if it would prove anything more than a great fissure in the mountain side. It wound on and on, and it widened in places, while there were places where it contracted till it seemed that a horse and rider could scarcely pass through.

Still it did not come to an end.

Behind the fugitive lads there was a clattering sound and the babel of calling voices, telling that the bandits were coming as swiftly as possible.

Juan said nothing. His eyes were filled with a hunted light, and he seemed quivering with terror.

Ephraim pressed straight onward, while Frank turned now and then to look back.

At one place, where the gap was particularly narrow, Frank said:

"Go on, boys. I'll overtake you pretty soon."

"Whut be yeou goin' ter do?" asked the Yankee lad.

"I am going to put a checker on those fellows. Go ahead."

Frank stopped, holding his rifle ready for use, and sitting sideways in the saddle.

There was a bend in the walls of the gap so he could not see the pursuers till they reached a certain point.

He could hear them coming nearer and nearer, and he knew just when they ought to appear.

The rifle rose and the butt was pressed against his shoulder.

The nose and head of a horse came into view.

That was all the boy wished to see.

The rifle spoke, and the horse fell, flinging its rider headlong against a boulder.

Swinging round in the saddle, Frank urged his horse onward again.

"That will cause them to hold up a little," muttered the boy, with satisfac-

tion. "It is possible they may not be so fierce to follow, as the one who is in advance will not know but he is liable to be shot at any moment."

Frank knew it was not going to be an easy thing to give Black Miguel the slip, but he also knew he need look for no mercy if he should fall into the hands of the bandit. It must be a case of struggle to the end and never surrender.

It took him some time to come up with Ephraim and Juan. The Yankee boy gave a deep sigh of relief when he looked back and saw Frank.

"Didn't know, fer sure, that was yeou that done ther shootin'," he said. "I was ruther afraid 'twas one uv them p'izen skunks what is after us."

"No, I did it myself."

"Whut did ye shute?"

"A horse."

"A hoss? Why, that's a clean waste uv paowder and lead!"

"Oh, I guess not."

"Why didn't yeou shute one uv them gol dern land pirates?"

"I don't like to shoot a man in that way when a horse will do just as well. I have never found any satisfaction in shooting at human beings, although I have been forced to do so several times in my life."

"Yeou've got a conscience as big as a haouse, Frank."

"Well, there is some satisfaction in having a conscience."

"Them critters won't hesitate abaout shootin' at us, an' mebbe ther very one yeou didn't shute will be ther one to shute yeou."

"Possibly."

"Then I kinder guess yeou'll be gol dern sorry ye let him go."

"Your philosophy is too much for me, Ephraim."

"Wal, it's hoss-sense."

They rode onward, and the sounds of pursuit did not press them as closely as be-



fore, showing the bandits had taken warning. The boys had expected the gap to end at any moment, but it continued, and, finally, they came out into a beautiful valley through which ran a stream of water. The valley was surrounded on every hand by towering mountains.

"Hurrah!" cried Frank, in delight. "We were not cornered, after all! This is what I call great luck."

"We be not corner in de gap," said Juan, wildly, "but we be corner here!"

"Cornered here? What do you mean?"

"I mean dat zis is de strange vallee where I heard Pepita ansare my call—de vallee where Black Miguel capture me-a! We be lost-a!"

## CHAPTER V.

### THINGS MYSTERIOUS.

"Lost? What do you mean by that? Why should we be lost here? I should say we have had great luck in finding this valley."

Juan made a gesture of despair.

"But we never find-a our way out! Black Miguel be in de pass by which we enter."

"But there must be some other way out of the valley."

"I t'ink not. When I come here before I do not know how get in. Now I remember I come through dat gap. I find no other way out."

"But this stream runs through the valley. It must come in somewhere and go out somewhere."

"That's right, by gum!" put in the Vermonter. "Warter kin run daown a maountain, but I be gol derved ef I ever saw any runnin' up hill yit!"

"The way it go out it run under de mountain," explained Juan.

"Under the mountain?"

"Si, Frank."

"How can that be?"

"It run into de tunnel—it go under de ground."

"Well, I have seen a case like that," declared Frank. "It was in the Tennessee Mountains, and the stream was known as Lost Creek. It sank into the earth and disappeared. No one knew where it came out."

"Just like a-dis!" cried Juan.

"Wal, it may run in all right," said Ephraim, hastily. "We've gotter git aout uv this mighty sudden, an' I cal'late it'd be a good plan ter find haow this warter gits inter the valley."

To this Frank agreed, and they rode up the stream.

Juan kept looking up at the high walls, and he finally uttered a cry, pointing to the black face of a steep bluff.

"Dere," he cried—"dere is where I see de black hole in de rock when I hear my sistare call to me!"

The boys looked with interest, but the face of the bluff seemed unbroken, and Frank said:

"You must be mistaken, Juan, for there is no hole there now."

"I see dat hole, den I see it no more. I am not mistake, Frank. Dat is de place. I tell you de hole it disappear-a."

"I ruther guess yeou was twisted, Juan," drawled Ephraim. "Yeou thought you saw the hole."

"I no make a mistake—no, no! I tell you I hear Pepita ansare me when I call to her—I know I hear it."

"Yeou hed bin wanderin' raound in the maountains, an' yeou was half crazy. You thought yeou heard her."

"No, no, no! I know! I know!"

"There is no time to discuss that," cut in Frank. "If those bandits follow us closely they will—There they come."

Hoarse shouts were heard behind them, and, looking back, they saw the bandits riding out into the valley. The ruffians saw the three lads, and the shouts they uttered were cries of triumph.



"I don't like the sound," declared Frank. "If they did not feel sure of bagging us they would not yell like that."

"Wal, they'll hev ter fight like thunder before they bag us, by thutteration!" spluttered the boy from Vermont.

"We nevar get out," declared Juan, in a disheartened way.

The boys rode onward, but the bandits made no immediate effort to follow them, which caused Frank still greater uneasiness.

"That shows, beyond a doubt, that they feel sure they have us," he said.

They rode up the valley for nearly half a mile, and then came in sight of a waterfall. Beyond the waterfall the stream seemed to pour out of the side of a mighty mountain.

The boys halted in dismay.

"That settles one thing," said Frank. "We'll not be able to get out of this valley in this direction. See; it closes in there, and there is no outlet. No wonder the bandits were in no hurry to follow us."

"I tell-a you dat!" cried Juan. "We be in de trap!"

Ephraim ground his teeth.

"Gol dern it all!" he raged. "Air we goin' ter be cooped up like a lot uv chickens! Let's go back an' fight aour way right out through them ding-blasted bandits."

"That is a trick we cannot accomplish just now," said Frank. "They will be looking for us to come hustling back, as soon as we find this end of the valley is closed."

"Wall, what be we goin' to do?"

Frank looked the situation over and considered, his face very grave and thoughtful. Near the waterfall a mass of bowlders were piled, and he regarded them with a critical eye.

"Let's go nearer and look them over," he said.

"What for?" asked Ephraim.

"To see what sort of a fort they will make. We may have to get into some situation where we can hold off Black Miguel and his band."

So they rode nearer, and it was seen that the rocks would afford them shelter if they were obliged to defend themselves from the outlaws.

"We will stop right here," declared Frank. "It is best to do the thing those bandits will not expect us to do, and they'll be looking for us to come back. Ten to one we'd be ambushed and shot down like dogs if we did so."

So they dismounted and led their horses behind a mass of bowlders, where they would be well sheltered in case bullets flew thickly.

Frank looked the mass over, and he quickly saw how strong a fort could be made.

"Take hold, boys," he directed. "We must roll a wall of stones together here. Then let Black Miguel come on."

They worked like beavers, for they did not know how soon the outlaws would come upon them. In the course of an hour they had a wall erected, and they were ready for the assault.

By this time they were all hungry, and they decided to eat from the provisions obtained at their last stopping place. This supply was small, for Juan had expected to obtain food from the peons who lived amid the mountains.

"We'll have to go easy with the rations to-night," said Frank. "It will be better to keep some for to-morrow."

"An' haow be we goin' ter git aour next supply?" asked Ephraim.

"Just now that is an unanswerable question."

While they were eating all were startled by a heavy rumbling explosion that seemed to be somewhere underground. They looked at each other in a bewildered manner, their eyes full of questioning.

"What in thutteration do yeou think



that was, Frank?" spluttered the boy from Vermont.

"It was not an earthquake."

"Wal, not by a jugful!"

"It sounded like a blast."

"It surely did, by gum!"

Then Juan was appealed to, but he was as much puzzled as the others.

"I cannot tell," he said, shaking his head. "This valley is one place of mystery. That is one of them."

The boys began to feel that there was, in truth, something uncanny about the valley. Even the mountains, which towered grim and ominous on every hand, seemed to shut the place in like mighty sentinels, as if the spot were forbidden to man.

The sun dropped down into the west, and shadows began to deepen in the gulches and ravines. With the growing shadows, the uneasiness of the boys increased. Although he would not confess it to himself, Frank disliked to spend a night there.

"Darn me!" Ephraim Gallup finally observed, unsteadily. "I feel jest the same's I did one time, when I went, with some other fellers, to stay in Jed Spruce's ha'nted haouse. I was kainder creepy all over my meat, an' I'm that air way naow."

"It would be a relief if the bandits made an attack on us," said Frank.

"They do that after dark," Juan said.

"An' there won't be a gol dern bit uv a moon, will they?"

"Oh, yes, there will be a faded old moon in the west the first of the night, but it may not shed much light into this valley. The last part of the night will be moonless."

"Then's when they'll come fer sure."

"We will make it hot for them, whenever they come."

About an hour later they heard the underground explosion once more, and this time it seemed louder and more distinct than before. They were upon a

ledge, and this was distinctly felt to jar.

"Next time she may be hard enough to knock a corner off one of these air maountains!" whispered Ephraim, in an awe-stricken way.

"I wonder if that can be anything the bandits are doing?" speculated Frank. "It can't be they are blowing down the walls and blockading the gap?"

After talking this over, it was decided that such a thing was not at all likely, but they arrived at no decided opinion concerning the explosions.

Night came on. The sun faded from the snowy peaks, and the darkness spread and deepened. Stars came out one by one, and the ghost of a moon seemed to rest in the hollow between two mountains.

During a part of the afternoon the horses had been picketed where they could feed on the grass, but they were again brought behind the barrier of rocks.

The boys huddled together and talked in whispers.

Suddenly, cutting through the night like a keen blade, came a wild cry, chilling the blood. It was full of unutterable despair, and it seemed to issue from the lips of a human being.

That cry caused the boys to shudder and huddle closer behind the rocks.

The waterfall splashed in the wan moonlight. Something caused them all to look at it at once.

Out from the falling water a horse and rider seemed to leap. The horse was coal black, and the rider was covered with something that glistened darkly in the moonlight.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE STRUGGLE OF PHANTOMS.

Three astounded boys crouched behind the rocks and stared at the horse and rider. The trio seemed stricken dumb and motionless with amazement.



Not a moment did the strange horseman stop, but straight down the stream he went.

Juan muttered a prayer in Spanish, crossing himself.

"Wal, gol dern ef that don't beat all creation!" gurgled Ephraim Gallup, as soon as he could get his breath. "Where in thutteration did they come frum?"

Frank was silent, being not a little puzzled.

The horseman had seemed utterly indifferent to the presence of the boys, or quite unaware that they were there. Away he rode, without being challenged. The horse scrambled from the bed of the stream, and the clickety-click of its hoofs grew fainter and fainter as it went galloping down the valley.

"What do yeou think uv that, Frank?" Ephraim demanded.

"I think it was a horse and rider," said Frank.

"A spirit!" whispered Juan.

"Git aout with yer gol dern nonsense!" exclaimed the Vermonter, promptly. "I don't take no stock in that air, yeou bet!"

"There was nothing supernatural about the horse and rider," Merriwell quietly declared. "They were flesh and blood."

"Ah, Frank," sighed Juan; "how do you explain de way they come—out of de water?"

"I am not going to try to explain it; but I believe it was a trick to frighten us. The outlaws are trying to break our nerve, so they will have an easy time when they come in on us."

"Dad-bim um!" grated Ephraim. "Dad-bim ther skunks! I don't like this air monkey business, but they'll have hard work ter scare me so I can't shute."

"That's right," nodded Frank, the dim light failing to show the expression of satisfaction on his face; "keep your nerve, old man, and we'll make them fight if they get the best of us."

"But we are in de trap-a!" cried Juan,

despairingly. "You do not know-a Black Miguel! He nevare let any one get out de trap. He keel-a for de fun. He like to see de blood run-a—like to hear de victim cry for pain!"

"Evidently he is an inhuman monster," came quietly from the lips of Frank Merriwell. "That is all the more reason why we should die fighting. It is not healthy to fall into his hands."

"Oh, my poor sistare!" sobbed the Chilian boy. "She nevare be save! Poor Pepita!"

Then he fell to repeating a prayer once more.

Frank was surprised at Juan's lack of nerve. The boy had seemed timid in the first place, but he had thought he would show more nerve when Chili was reached and he found himself in his own country.

However, on considering the condition under which Juan had lived—on remembering that his father had been a hunted fugitive—Frank did not wonder so much that the dark-faced lad was not very brave.

"Perhaps he will show up all right in a pinch," thought Frank, who was inclined to be liberal.

For a long time they sat and talked of the surprising appearance of the horse and rider. It was plain to all that the head and shoulders of the rider had been covered by the protecting folds of something, on which the thin moonlight made the water glisten.

"He came aout uv the warter," muttered Ephraim; "but haow in thutteration did he git into it?"

That was a question difficult to answer.

The early night wore on, and the shadowy moon dropped lower and lower into the hollow between the two mountain peaks.

The boys spoke of the wild, wailing cry they had heard, and wondered if it would be repeated. They were listening for it when it came.



The moon had gone, and darkness was heavy in the valley. The cry seemed to float along on the heavy air, and it was expressive of the most unutterable agony.

Then two fiery figures were seen racing along the black wall to the south, swiftly coming nearer the head of the valley, and changing in shape as they came.

"Santa Maria!" gasped Juan, and he covered his eyes with his hands.

"What in gol darnation is it?" asked the Vermonter, in wonder.

"Look!" directed Frank. "They have stopped. Well, this is a free show, and no mistake!"

On the smooth face of the precipice two figures had halted. One was a grinning skeleton, every bone of which seemed composed of white fire; the other was a scarlet demon, armed with a flaming sword. The demon had been pursuing the skeleton, but now the latter, seemingly driven to bay, faced about to give battle.

"Say, I want to go right back to Vermont!" groaned Ephraim Gallup, his teeth chattering. "I can't stan' this, gol dern my boots ef I kin! It's too much, by thutter!"

Then, before the eyes of the boys, a brief but savage battle took place. The skeleton grasped the demon by the throat, but was cast off, and the demon plunged its sword through between the skeleton's ribs, which did not seem to harm the skeleton in the least.

Ephraim began to forget his fears, and grew excited.

"Say, which way ye bettin', Frank?" he demanded. "I'll go ye that ther skeleton knocks ther Old Boy out in two rounds!"

"I'll stand you on that," said Frank. "The demon is bound to do execution with that sword."

"Oh, that don't caount, for the skeleton ain't got no flesh nor blood. He don't

mind it to have the sword poked through him a few dozen times."

"Well, he doesn't seem to mind it," confessed Frank, as the demon jabbed the skeleton several times.

Juan, hearing their voices, lowered his hands, took a look at the awe-inspiring battle, then covered his eyes with his hands again and resumed praying.

"Oh, shut up with yer jabberin'," cried the Yankee lad. "Git inter ther game here, an' back yer man!"

"The saints preserva us!" palpitated Juan, in English.

"We'll hev ter do a little preservin' aourselves, ur they won't stan' by us," snorted Ephraim, in disgust.

Now the battle between the two glowing figures became terrific. The demon flung aside his sword, and they grappled. Once, twice, three times the skeleton was dashed to the ground. When it arose the third time it was seen that its left arm had been broken off at the shoulder.

Still the battle raged with unabated fierceness, for the skeleton seemed infuriated beyond measure by its injury. It hurled itself at the crimson demon, which it caught with its remaining hand and tried to strangle.

The demon writhed and twisted in its efforts to fling off its relentless antagonist. Sometimes both bent close to the ground, and then they straightened up. At length the skeleton was dashed down again, and, when it got up, one leg had fallen off at the knee.

"Naow I guess he's aout uv the ring fer sure," said Ephraim, regretfully.

But, no! the skeleton hopped round on one foot as lively as a sparrow. It flung itself on the demon, who seemed enraged beyond measure by the persistency of its fleshless antagonist.

The battle ended in a tempestuous struggle, and the demon actually tore the skeleton to pieces, flung it, a shattered



mass, to the ground, and then, in an instant, skeleton and demon vanished.

"Great yowling cats!" palpitated the Yankee boy. "That was the gol derndest scrap I ever see!"

Frank laughed.

"Our friends, the enemy, seem to be doing everything possible to make it pleasant for us while we remain here."

"What do yeou think, Frank—haow was that done?"

"They were spirits!" hissed Juan. "Don't arouse the anger of de spirits!"

"Don't——"

"No! Mebbe Black Miguel he be scared away. If so, then we git out—perhap'."

"I scarcely think Black Miguel will be frightened away so easily. I don't fancy he has been alarmed by anything that has happened."

For the third time the wild, wailing cry sounded in the valley, dying out into a faint moan that was nerve shaking.

"I don't understand how such a yell as that can come from human lips, yet it seems like a human cry," said Frank.

"It is a cry from a lost soul!" whispered the Chilian boy.

"Nonsense! I don't take stock in that. You need a tonic, Juan; your blood is in a bad condition."

"Ah, Frank, I know-a—I know-a!"

"If you think you do it is useless to argue with you."

"No use to talk-a."

"Then I will not try it."

"But yeou have got to acknowledge there has bin some gol dern queer things took place sence we come here," said Ephraim.

"Some things rather surprising, but nothing supernatural."

"That's your idea, hey?"

"Yes."

"What abaout the hoss an' feller that came aout of the waterfall?"

"Surely there was nothing supernatural about that. It was a trick, and that is all.

It was done to frighten us and shake our nerve, as these other things have been done. When the bandits are satisfied that we are overcome with terror, they will come down on us with a rush. We must keep our nerve about us, or we'll all be killed without striking a blow in our own defense."

"By gum, yeou're right! But I'd kinder like to know what them critters will do next."

Barely had the words fallen from Ephraim's lips when a flash of light came down over the waterfall, and a flare of fire ran along the bosom of the stream that flowed through the valley, so the stream itself seemed to be a river of fire!

## CHAPTER VII.

### A SHOT IN THE DARK.

"Santa Maria!"

"Great Scott!"

"Darn my punkins!"

Juan, Frank and Ephraim uttered these exclamations in turn, as they crouched behind the rocks and stared in amazement at the river of fire.

The entire surface of the stream seemed blazing, and the light illumined the valley.

It was a remarkable spectacle, and one well calculated to paralyze the lads with astonishment and fear.

The light showed the black rocks, the jagged walls, the frowning precipices, but revealed no living human being to the boys behind the rocks.

"This is rather remarkable, I must confess!" said Frank, staring wonderingly at the fiery stream.

"Darned ef I ever saw warter burn like that air before!" spluttered the Vermont lad.

"It is de end of de world-a!" moaned Juan.

"Dunno but it is," nodded Ephraim. "When warter gits ter burnin', other



things oughter ketch purty gol dern soon!"

"What's this smell in the air?" asked Frank.

"Dunno. What is it?"

"It seems like burning oil."

"So it does. Mebbe that river runs aout uv an oil factory somewhere."

"The fire is sinking already."

This was true. Near the waterfall it was dying out and floating away on the bosom of the stream, although it seemed to burn as brightly as ever, further down the valley.

Little patches of fire drifted swiftly down the stream and burned themselves out on the surface of the water. Soon there was no fire in the vicinity of the waterfall, and in a very few minutes there was none anywhere along the stream.

Darkness lay dense and awesome in the uncanny valley.

Now the boys noticed that the horses were snorting and rearing, apparently greatly terrified by what had taken place and by their own struggles.

"They're liable to break away!" exclaimed Frank, springing up. "We must look out for that."

"That's so, by gum!" cried Ephraim.

Together they hastened toward the horses. This was an unfortunate move, for, suddenly appearing as they did in the darkness, they completed the work of rendering the animals frantic.

"Whoa! Easy there!" called Frank, hoping to reassure the creatures with his voice.

The horses were making too much noise to hear him. They reared and plunged, and one of them broke away.

Despite the fact that he was rather awkward in appearance, Ephraim was strong and quick. Happening to be near the horse that freed itself, the Vermonter leaped through the air and caught at the bit of broken rope.

By the rarest chance, Ephraim grasped

the rope close to the horse's head. Then, with a leap and a swing, he landed on the animal's back.

"Whoa, gol dern ye!" he cried, triumphantly. "Think ye kin git erway frum Ephraim Gallup? Ef ye do, yeou'll make ther biggest mistake uv yeour life, by thutter!"

The horse continued to rear and plunge while Ephraim was speaking, and then, all at once, the creature seemed to realize that it was no longer held by the rope.

A wild squeal came from the animal's lips, and away it shot down the valley, bearing the boy on its back.

"Stop!" shouted Frank. "Come back!"

"Can't!" was the reply. "This gol derned hoss is——"

That was all Frank could understand, for the horse continued to tear down the valley, bearing the Yankee lad along.

Frank did his best to quiet the other animals, and he succeeded in a few moments.

Before he had quieted them to his satisfaction, he heard a series of wild yells far down the valley, followed by three or four shots, and still further yelling.

"Hard luck!" muttered Merriwell, bitterly. "Ten to one Eph has run plumb upon the bandits, and has been killed or captured. Now fate seems dead against us."

The yelling died out, but the final cries were full of triumph, and Frank's heart was heavy in his bosom. Having pacified the horses, he returned to the place where Juan crouched and shivered.

"We be lost, lost!" murmured Juan.

Frank said nothing, for he was trying to think what should be done in this emergency. He had not given up hope, and he knew it was possible Ephraim had escaped, but his sober judgment told him the situation was one of deadly peril, where there did not seem one chance in a thousand that one of the three lads



would ever leave that fateful valley alive.

If their foes had been aught but the most deadly and desperate cut-throats, creatures who often shed human blood for the mere pleasure of doing so, the peril might not have seemed so grave.

Frank was much disappointed in Juan, for he had fancied the boy who was seeking to find his lost sister and rescue her would be brave and daring. Now he did not depend on the Chilean boy in the least, and he felt that Juan was an incubance.

But he could not rest without knowing what had happened to Ephraim, so he determined to creep down the valley. The outlaws were down there, and he might get near enough to them to find out something.

He had turned to tell Juan what move he thought of making when he was surprised and startled to hear a galloping horse approaching.

"Dey coming!" palpitated the Chilean lad. "Dey coming now to kill-a us!"

"Well, we will make it a very interesting job for them!" grated Frank, swinging his rifle round ready for use. "I'll wager something I perforate a few of the villains!"

Nearer and nearer came the galloping horse.

"There can be but one," muttered Frank. "I wonder who that is, and what he wants?"

Then his heart gave a great leap of hope.

"It may be Ephraim!" he gasped. "If it should be——"

He stopped short, for the horse had ceased to gallop. The animal was coming forward at a walk, and was now quite near.

"Halt, there!"

The ringing command came from Frank Merriwell's lips, and it was emphasized by a double click, as he cocked his rifle.

The horse stopped.

"Young senor, I wish to speak with you."

The words, uttered in a smooth, musical voice, came through the darkness, and they seemed like an electric shock to Juan, who started up with a smothered cry.

Frank was a little surprised, but he immediately asked:

"Do you mean that you wish to speak with me?"

"Si, senor; you are the one."

"Who are you?"

"That can make no difference to you. At this time I propose to be your friend, if you will let me."

"My friend? Impossible!"

"Not so, young senor. If you will let me be your friend, that I will."

Through Frank's head flashed the thought that this was a trick, and he was wary. To his surprise, Juan was kneeling at his side, fingering a rifle, and breathing heavily. The Chilean seemed overcome with a desire to do some shooting.

"Steady!" whispered Frank. "Don't be in a hurry. Watch out that we are not taken by surprise while I talk with that man."

"That man!" fluttered Juan. "Oh, if I could see-a heem!"

"I cannot understand why you should offer friendship," Frank called to the unseen man. "We have no friends here."

"And you should have no enemies here, young senor. It is the fault of your own that you come into this trap, from which you can never get away without I help you."

"Why should you help me?"

"Because I do no wish to see you killed. You do not belong in Chili, and you do come here on a foolish expedition. I know all about that. Now you yourself do find in a bad trap. Black Miguel have you very fast, and it is the wish of him to kill you quick and soon. I have induced him to hold still for a little time."



Frank was doubtful; he could not believe the man was speaking the truth. Behind all this he felt sure there was a plot to deceive them.

"Why should you induce him to hold on?"

"Why should I wish that you are killed? You have never harmed me in some way, and against you I have not one thing at all. With Black Miguel I have some influence, and I can get him to let you go away without trouble. I will do it on a certain condition."

"Now comes the trap!" thought Frank; and then he asked to know the "certain condition."

After a moment of hesitation, the unseen man said:

"With you you have a boy, Juan Matias by name."

"Well?"

"You have him?"

"Yes."

"There were three of you, but one of you he has become a captive to Black Miguel."

Frank's heart leaped and swelled with a feeling of relief. So Ephraim still lived.

"The loss of him leaves you very weak," the man went on. "You are but two to many. You have no chance to escape. If my offer you do not accept, you will all be killed."

"Make your offer."

"It is this: Your friend who was with you is not harmed; but he will be killed right away if you do not accept the terms, which are that Juan Matias you shall give up to Black Miguel. If Juan you give up, the one who is captured shall be set at freedom, and away you may go without being at all hurt. Remember, that it will cost at once the life of him who is captured if Juan Matias you do not give up. What do you answer?"

Then, to Frank's astonishment, Juan screamed:

"I ansare dat you be de human moñ-

ster! You be de one dat kill-a my fadare—steal-a my sistare! You be de Marques de la Villa del Villar de la Aguila! May de saints direct dis bullet!"

There was a flash of fire, followed by a ringing report, and Frank knew the Chilian boy had discharged his rifle.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"ADIOS!"

This action on the part of Juan had been quite unexpected by Frank Merriwell, so he was unable to prevent it. The moment it happened, however, he clutched the boy, crying:

"Stop! Do not fire again!"

Juan laughed wildly.

"I hope I have no need to do dat!" he returned. "I hear where his voice sound-a, and I shoot toward it. Ha! ha! Mebbe I do not miss."

Frank was astonished, for Juan seemed entirely changed. He no longer cringed and cowered, but he seemed wrought to madness and despair.

The rifle was taken from the Chilian boy, and then Frank called:

"Are you injured, sir?"

"Not at all," was the calm reply. "The bullet passed within a few inches of my head, but I was not at all touched."

This seemed to make Juan frantic. He raved in Spanish for several minutes, showing he had a passionate nature and a fiery temper. He was quite changed from the quiet, timid lad of a short time before.

"Be quiet!" ordered Frank, sternly. "What is the good of all this bluster and noise! Keep still!"

Juan became silent, but he was heard to grate his teeth occasionally, and his restless movements told that he was holding himself in check by a great effort.

"Do you accept my proposal?" demanded the man in the darkness, impatiently. "At once you must answer, for I



care not to remain here and be shot at some more."

"Is that the only condition you have to offer?" asked Frank, his heart heavy in his bosom.

"Si, senor; the only one."

"If I give up Juan Matias, you will release Ephraim Gallup, and will promise that we shall leave the mountains without being harmed?"

"Si, senor."

Juan breathed heavily. He was awaiting Frank's decision. Frank had expected he would entreat not to be given up, but he did nothing of the sort.

Within himself Frank Merriwell was fighting a battle. Juan Matias was of foreign blood, while Ephraim Gallup, brave and true, was a Yankee, an old schoolmate, a true friend and comrade. When it came to a choice between them there could be no hesitation on his part.

If Juan were not given up Ephraim would be killed immediately, and there could be little doubt but the bandits would afterward complete their work by slaughtering the other boys. By the sacrifice of the Chilian lad the other two might escape.

Frank thought this all over in a moment, and then he despised himself for hesitating. He saw his honor blackened, and felt a thrill of shame because he had hesitated an instant.

"What do you tell him, Frank?"

Juan asked the question, his voice soft and low.

"Tell him!" said Frank, hoarsely; "There is but one thing to tell him! I took your hand in San Francisco, and swore to be your partner to the bitter end. Do you think I will go back on my oath! No, no—not even to save Ephraim Gallup, my old schoolmate!"

Then he passed a hand across his forehead, groaning:

"Poor Ephraim!"

"Come, come!" called the impatient voice in the darkness. "What is to be your answer, young senor. Will you give Juan Matias up to save the other and yourself?"

"No, never!"

The man uttered an exclamation of astonishment in Spanish.

"It cannot be you are very so much the

great fool!" he cried. "Senor Gallup will be killed immediate I carry back your answer. And then you cannot escape. Black Miguel will bring his men and finish the work. All three will fall. Think—think how it can be that you may save yourself and your friend if you but do give up Juan Matias."

"I have thought of it. Go ahead with your murderous work! I shall stand by Juan to the end!"

"If not of yourself, then of your friend you should think. It is your duty to save him."

"If this proposal were made to him, I know what his answer would be. He would despise me if I gave up Juan to save him and to save myself. You have had my answer."

Juan clutched Frank's arm, and his voice trembled with emotion, as he panted:

"T'ank-a you, t'ank-a you! You sure be de true friend-a! But it be not right-a—you must not die for me-a. No, no, no! If you can git away, den I go give-a myself up! I do dat now. My fazare is dead; my sistare is lost; nothing I have to live for! Tell him, Frank—tell him dat I give myself up."

Frank Merriwell was dazed. Could it be possible this was the cringing, shivering, unnerved boy whom he had regarded as a coward a short time ago? Such a thing seemed impossible.

"Are you in earnest, Juan?" he demanded.

"I am, Frank. Tell-a him dat."

"No!" cried Merriwell, fiercely. "Ephraim would despise me still more when he knew all—and I should hate myself! No! We can make no terms with this villainous marques!"

"But, think, Frank, think——"

"Juan, the chances are that this is a trick. We have shown them we can fight, and they fear us, boys though we are. If you were given up, and we submitted ourselves into the hands of the bandits, all would be murdered in cold blood. There may be no hope for us, but, at least, we can die fighting!"

The man in the darkness heard these words, and he flung back:

"All right! Your own way you shall have. The chance you have been given,



and now I can never be able to save you some more. Black Miguel will bring to you your death. *Adios.*"

A moment later the horse was heard galloping away.

Juan tried to use the rifle once more, wishing to send a shot after the man; but Frank would not permit it, as he believed it would be a waste of lead.

"Oh, Frank!" cried the Chilian boy; "you should have let me go. It be no use at all, for we all have to be kill-a at last."

"Juan, it was a trick—I am satisfied on that point. Black Miguel is not going to let any of us escape, if he can help it. If I gave you up and surrendered myself into the power of the bandits, they could kill us all without danger to themselves. But, even if they were honest, I could not think of giving you up in order to escape. I swore to stand by you through thick and thin—I gave you my hand on it. Frank Merriwell never breaks his word."

"Oh, Frank! I think dere never be another boy like-a you! You be so grand!"

"Oh, that is nonsense, Juan! I am doing what any decent fellow would do—that's all. Don't give me too much credit."

But there was a great fear in Frank's heart. Ephraim was a captive in the hands of the bandits, and it was likely he would be destroyed without delay.

Was there no way to save him?

Frank asked himself the question over and over, and then he formed a resolution to do what he could.

"Juan," he said, "I am going down the valley to see if I can find out anything concerning Ephraim."

Juan said nothing.

"I want you to stay here," Frank went on. "I want you to watch the horses and hold this fort, if any one tries to take it."

He expected the Chilian boy would remonstrate, and great was his surprise when Juan calmly said:

"I will do what I can, Frank. I am not so very much of the fighter."

"Keep cool and listen," advised Frank. "When I return I will whistle twice, make a pause, and then whistle once. By that signal you will know me."

"I will."

"If you hear anything suspicious utter a challenge. If you get no answer fire."

"I will."

Frank paused, and then his hand found the shoulder of his companion, whom he had come to respect anew within a few minutes.

"I may not come back, Juan," he said, a trifle huskily. "I am going down there to give Ephraim a helping hand, if I can. If he is in danger of being killed, I shall stand by him. The bandits may finish us both. If I do not come back—if we never see each other again—farewell, Juan."

A sob came from the throat of the Chilian boy, and, suddenly, he embraced Frank, clinging to him a moment.

"*Adios! adios! adios!*" May all the saints defend-a you, Frank! While you are gone I will pray, pray, pray. My great sorrow is that I bring-a you here."

"Don't let that trouble you, Juan, my lad. You did not bring me here—I came of my own accord. You have nothing to weigh heavily on your conscience. My regret is that we have stumbled into this trap so soon—that we have been unable to solve the mystery of your father's and sister's disappearance. It was fate. Good-by."

"*Adios!*"

Rifle in hand, Frank crept over the rocks and slipped silently away into the darkness.

"He will never return!" said Juan, in Spanish.

## CHAPTER IX.

### FRANK TO THE RESCUE.

Slowly Frank made his way down the valley, uncertain as to what moment he might walk into a trap.

"At any rate, I will die fighting," he thought.

He held his rifle ready for immediate use, and he could work the repeater with astonishing swiftness and accuracy.

The darkness seemed to deepen. The stream gurgled faintly, and Frank kept close by it, pausing frequently to listen.

It seemed that he had reached the vicinity of the gap by which they had entered the valley when, of a sudden, high up at one side of the valley a light blazed forth.

It seemed that the light was turned upon the boy, and he immediately dropped to the ground.



Not a moment too soon.

Across the valley shot the bar of light, passing directly over him. Had he been standing he must have been revealed.

"Well, this is interesting!" muttered Frank, clutching his rifle in anticipation of an attack. "Can those people see in the dark that they are able to tell some one is moving down the valley? This is surely a valley of mysteries."

For a few seconds the bar of light remained motionless, and then it moved. Away it traveled to the south, glaring broadly on one side of the valley, while it gleamed out like a fiery eye high up in the face of the black wall on the other side.

"That is a powerful reflector," muttered Frank. "If the light should reach me, I would be revealed."

All at once the fiery eye seemed to close with a wink, and blank darkness lay in the valley once more.

Frank felt sure the persons behind the reflector had been surveying the valley to see if any one was moving therein.

Some moments after the reflector was shut off another light gleamed out from the wall, showing an opening in the apparently solid rock.

The light came from a flaring torch, which was held above the head of a man. Other men appeared in the opening, and the light of the torch showed them swinging out over and descending to the level of the valley by means of a rope or a rope ladder.

Frank believed he understood why the reflector had been used. The persons who were coming down into the valley wished to learn if they were likely to be observed by enemies.

"Well, they barely missed me," thought the boy. "If I had not dropped as if I were shot, they would have seen me."

Three persons came out of the opening and descended the ladder, after which the man with the torch retreated and disappeared.

Ten seconds later the reflector suddenly shot a light into the valley once more.

"Great Scott!" gasped Frank, who had risen to his feet and moved down the stream a short distance. "This is getting decidedly warm!"

There seemed to be no place of conceal-

ment near at hand, so he dropped to the ground once more, and lay still.

The light of the reflector played over the bottom of the valley. It came nearer and nearer to the boy, who clutched his rifle and thrust it forward, ready to shoot if forced to do so.

The light fell on the stream, near which Frank was stretched on the ground, and the boy scarcely restrained an exclamation of astonishment.

The stream had dwindled to a mere thread, which was trickling along the lowest part of its bed. It had been from thirty to forty feet in width, but now a person could step over it with the greatest ease.

"Another of the remarkable things which seem to be constantly taking place in this valley," thought the lad.

Then a strange fancy came to him. It was that the stream had been burned up by the fire.

This thought he immediately thrust aside, regarding it as childish and absurd. His attention was once more given to the shifting light of the reflector.

This light finally fell on three persons who were crossing the stream a short distance below where Frank lay. One of the three was plainly an Indian. The other two were half-bloods, and all looked fierce and formidable.

"They belong to the bandits," thought the boy.

When the trio had crossed the stream the light from the reflector suddenly vanished again, and all was darkness in the valley of mystery.

The light had revealed to Frank that he was yet a considerable distance above the gap by which the valley had been entered.

He arose to his feet and moved forward slowly, pausing frequently to listen with great intentness.

He was expecting that the light from the reflector might be shot into the valley at any moment.

This, however, did not occur again for some time, and he was enabled to find the gap without being in further danger from the light.

There were sentinels on guard at the mouth of the gap. He heard them speak-



ing to each other in the darkness and heard them walking to and fro.

At a distance below the gap a light shone out into the valley.

Frank moved toward this point, and, in a short time, he found himself looking into an alcove among the rocks where the bandits were camped.

His heart leaped into his mouth the moment he looked in there, for he saw the ruffians were preparing to shoot Ephraim Gallup, who was standing with his back against a small tree, to which he was tied securely.

The light of a fire revealed the bandits and the unfortunate captive, who had been carried into their clutches by a frightened and unruly horse.

A line of savage-looking men, with leveled rifles, were standing within ten paces of the luckless lad.

In a moment those rifles would belch forth fire and death.

With the quickness of thought, Frank Merriwell's rifle leaped to his shoulder, and he began to work it with such rapidity that there was scarcely a break between the reports.

For once in his life, at least, he did not hesitate to shoot at human beings, for he knew it was the only way of saving his friend.

Two of the six executioners fell immediately, while a third clasped his side, dropped his rifle, and staggered away.

The attack was so sudden and unexpected that the bandits were thrown into the utmost confusion and terror.

Frank leaped forward, swinging his rifle from his shoulder by its strap. Out flashed a knife, and he reached the side of Ephraim Gallup. Two swift slashes set the captive free. Frank's hand grasped Ephraim's wrist, and he literally yanked the Vermonter toward the darkness beyond range of the firelight.

"Run!" he panted.

"Gol dern me ef I don't!" gasped the Yankee lad.

"It will be a hot race for the water-fall," said Frank; "but we may be able to make it."

"We must make it," grated the other boy. "We'll lose aour skulps ef we don't, an' that's sartin' sure."

The sentries at the mouth of the gap

had been alarmed, and they were expecting an attempt would be made to escape from the valley by passing them.

The bandits who had been thrown into confusion by Frank's attack recovered swiftly, and they set out after the running lads, shouting hoarsely and angrily. Sometimes they fired at random into the darkness, hoping to wing one of the boys.

Both youths knew there was danger that they might be hit by a chance bullet, and they bowed their heads and ran for all that was in them.

Ephraim had not been given time to wonder at Frank's unexpected appearance. All the emotion that he could feel was a sensation of thankfulness at his escape from what seemed certain death.

The stream was reached, and Frank thought of crossing over, hoping to deceive their pursuers; but, to his great astonishment, the channel was once more bankful with water.

Such marvelous changes took place in the valley that it was not strange he should feel dazed and bewildered.

Up the stream they went.

The bandits were making a great noise behind them, but the lads were holding their own, if not gaining.

Then came something that caused Frank to utter an exclamation of anger and dismay.

The light from the reflector was flung into the valley again.

"That light will be the ruin of us!" grated Merriwell. "If it falls on us it will be kept there, and the bandits will be given a chance to shoot us down."

"That's right, b'gosh!" gasped Ephraim. "But what in thutteration be we goin' to do?"

"Stop! I will try something."

They stopped, Frank dropped on one knee, leveled his rifle, and took aim at the light.

The report of the rifle was followed by a distinct crash, and the light went out.

"Hooray!" cried Ephraim, in delight. "You done it slick!"

"Down!" hissed Frank, catching hold of the Yankee boy, and yanking him to the ground.

Not a second too soon, for the flash of Frank's rifle had been seen, and several



shots were fired toward the spot, the bullets whistling over the prostrate boys.

"Up!" panted Frank — "up, and away!"

Then they sprang up and fled onward toward the waterfall.

It was a desperate race for life, but the boys were fleet of foot, and they were not overtaken. The fortress of rocks was reached, and they crouched behind the wall, panting for breath, and ready to defend the spot to the end.

But the bandits did not press them, and, after a time, Frank looked around for Juan.

The Chilian boy was not at hand, and in vain they called him. He did not answer. The two horses remained in their places, but Juan Matias was gone.

## CHAPTER X.

### UNDER THE WATERFALL.

"Gone!"

The boys uttered the word in unison, staring at each other through the darkness.

"Gol dern me ef I kin understand where he kin hev gone to!" exclaimed Ephraim.

"Did yeou tell him to stay here?"

"Sure; and he said he would do so."

"Can't never put no dependence on the word of a Spaniard."

"There is where you are wrong, Ephraim. There are Spaniards who are honest as anybody. It is the half-bloods you cannot trust."

"Wal, wasn't Wand a half-blood?"

"In one sense he is, but the mixture is good—half Spanish and half English. By half-bloods I mean the Spanish-Indians. They are treacherous."

"Wal, Wand didn't hev any nerve."

"I don't know about that. I think he did have nerve."

Then Frank told of the proposal made by the Marques Aguila, and how Juan had offered to give himself up that the other boys might go free.

"That clean beats me!" acknowledged Ephraim. "I wouldn't hev believed it ef anybuddy but yeou hed tole me."

"It is the truth, and I am sure the boy was in earnest."

"Then yeou don't think he was skeered away from here by the saound of the

shutin' that has bin goin' on daown below?"

"I do not think so, but he may have been."

"He didn't take either one uv the hosses."

"No."

"Mebbe he kinder thought he could git away better 'thout 'em."

"I do not believe he would try to get away till he knew what had happened to me—I will not believe it."

"Then where has he gone?"

"That is more than I can tell."

"What'll we do?"

"Wait a while and see if he does not turn up."

So the boys settled behind the rocks and waited.

A profound silence seemed to rest over the night-shrouded valley. Some way there was something ominous in the silence. The boys felt creepy and uneasy.

"Seems like them critters is crawlin' up on us," whispered the lad from Vermont. "Can't hear 'em, kin ye?"

"No; I can hear nothing—except a galloping horse."

"Hoss is comin'."

"That's right."

"Who kin be with the critter?"

"The Marques Aguila, perhaps."

"Comin' here ag'in—for what?"

"That remains to be seen. Keep still."

Nearer and nearer came the galloping horse, till it was quite close at hand. The boys held their weapons ready for use, and Frank was on the point of uttering a challenge when the horse was heard to take to the stream.

"Halt, there!"

The cry came from Frank's lips.

There was no answer. The horse continued to splash along the stream, being now near at hand.

"Halt, or we fire!"

The horse seemed to spring forward, there was a break in the sound of the waterfall, and then the horse could be heard no more.

"Great gosh!" gurgled Ephraim.

"Gone!" muttered Frank.

"Mebbe that's right; but where has the critter gone?"

"Under the waterfall."



"Under the waterfall! Git aout! Haow kin that be?"

"The falling water must conceal the mouth of a cave."

"Smotherin' smoke! I never thought uv that!"

"I thought of it when the horse and rider appeared some time ago, and now I feel almost certain of it."

"Ef yeou're right, it beats all natur, that's all!"

"I will wager I am right, and I am going to prove it."

"Haow?"

"By looking for the cave—by going into it."

"Haow ye goin' into it?"

"Through the waterfall."

"Thutter!"

"I should not be surprised if it proved to be one of the entrances to the bandit's cave, for I am certain the bandits have a cave near at hand."

The Vermonter was silent a moment and then he said:

"Frank."

"Well?"

"Yeou've got the longest head uv any feller I ever saw, b'gosh! Yeou simply beat all creation!"

Frank laughed a bit, softly.

"I don't care about beating all creation," he said. "If I could fool these bloodthirsty bandits a bit, about now, I would be well satisfied."

"Fool 'em! Yeou've nigh done better than that already, by gum! Ef yeou didn't lick the hull gang fer a minute, I don't know a gol dern thing."

"But we are still trapped in this valley. I want to fool them and get out. That's what I am figuring on just now."

"Wal, figger erway, an' I hope ye'll figger it aout."

A moment later Frank directed Ephraim to follow, and then climbed over the rocks and started toward the waterfall. Frank had reloaded his rifle, and Ephraim's rifle, which had been left behind the rocks, was recovered and in the possession of its owner.

Frank crept down close to the edge of the waterfall, passed his rifle to his companion, and said:

"I expect to be well drenched, but it

will pay if I discover what I am looking for. I don't mind the wetting."

He stepped into the stream and waded out a bit. All at once he paused, a low exclamation breaking from his lips.

"What is it?" asked Ephraim, softly.

"A light!" exclaimed Frank. "Can't you see it shining on the water? It is beyond the waterfall."

Ephraim saw it, and it gave him an uncanny sensation. He felt as if something cold were creeping along his spine.

"What's it mean?" he hoarsely whispered.

"It means there is somebody in there with a light," replied Frank, exultantly.

"It means that I was right in thinking there is a cave beneath this waterfall. It means—— The light is gone!"

Quick as a flash Frank plunged through the sheet of falling water. A moment later he came back, shaking the water from his clothes.

"Quick!" he gurgled, "give me my rifle! Come on!"

"What do you mean to do?"

"Go in there."

"What did you find?"

"A cave, as I thought I should."

"Anything else?"

"Didn't stop to look for anything else, then. Come on."

Frank tucked the butt of his revolver up under his coat, and plunged through the waterfall again.

Ephraim had waded out into the stream, but he hesitated a moment. Then he set his teeth, muttering:

"Here goes!"

Through he went.

It was no more than a thin sheet of water, and they were on the other side in a moment. Ephraim felt himself grasped, and Frank's voice whispered in his ear:

"Be still! The man who came in here ahead of us is not far away."

Clinging to each other, they moved forward.

The place was very damp, and the walls dripped moisture, for the water forced itself down through cracks in the rocks.

In a few minutes they came to a point where a passage led off to the left, and there they halted abruptly, for, in the distance, gleamed the light of a torch.

That light showed them a man, who



suddenly disappeared as if he had stepped through an open doorway.

"Come on!" hissed Frank, and he skurried along that passage, with Ephraim close at his heels.

By rare good fortune, they made little noise, and they quickly reached the place where the man had disappeared.

There they paused and looked into a large dry chamber, which seemed to be well aired, as if it opened to the outer world some way.

At the farther side of this chamber were some rude stalls, and two of these stalls were occupied by horses.

In the middle of this chamber, or underground stable, a man was rubbing the water from another horse.

Frank knew this was the man who had just ridden into the cavern.

Both boys were filled with astonishment, for of all the wonderful things they had beheld since entering the mysterious valley, this seemed the most remarkable.

They could not express their feelings by words, but Frank's hand gave Eph's arm a pressure that meant much.

They took good care not to be seen.

The man did his work thoroughly, drying the horse well, and then covering the animal with a warm blanket, after which the creature was led into one of the stalls and fed.

When this matter had been attended to the man picked up the torch, which had been thrust upright into a rift in the rocks, and started to leave the stable.

The boys drew back hastily, crouched in an angle of the passage, and prepared to meet the man, if he should come upon them.

But he left the stable and turned the other way.

They followed, keeping within view of the flaring torch.

"He will lead us to the hiding place of the bandits," whispered Frank.

"Sure as preachin' is preachin'," returned Ephraim.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE STRUGGLE ON THE LAKE.

The passage did not lead straight ahead, but turned and twisted in many directions, so the boys sometimes lost sight of the torch for a moment.

Once or twice the man seemed to halt and listen.

At length a flight of rude steps, hewn from the solid rock, was reached.

Far above them they saw the man climbing upward.

The wonders of that underground place were astounding, but the boys had no time to stop and think of that.

As soon as they dared, they started to climb the stairs. The torch vanished, and they knew the man had reached the top.

"Be lively!" palpitated Frank, as he scrambled up the steps.

They made some noise, and Frank feared the man would hear them; but nothing of the kind took place.

At last the top of the flight was reached.

Far away the torch gleamed and vanished.

Regardless of any danger that might await them in the darkness, they rushed toward the spot where it had been seen.

The passage widened, and then it turned suddenly and came out into a mighty chamber.

Frank clutched Ephraim, and the boys stopped abruptly on the brink of an underground lake that lay spread before them.

At a distance on the bosom of this lake a boat was moving from them. In the boat the flaring torch was set. The man they had followed was paddling the boat away.

The light of the torch gleamed on the bosom of the water that lay like a great pool of ink, covering the entire floor of the chamber.

Overhead was such dense darkness that the roof could not be seen.

In a moment Frank saw the man in the boat was getting away, for the great body of water would keep them from following him, as no other boat seemed at hand.

Frank was desperate. He had believed they would be able to follow the man to the outlaws' den, and he did not fancy being baffled in such a manner.

"I must stop him!" he grated.

He dropped on one knee, flinging his rifle to his shoulder. But just as Frank was going to utter a challenge a most surprising thing took place.

A figure suddenly uprose from the bot-



toin of the boat, grappled with the man, and a fierce battle began.

"Great gosh!" gasped Ephraim Gallup. "What in jee-thutter is ther meanin' uv that?"

Frank was no less astonished than the Yankee boy, and he stared in wonderment at the struggling forms.

The torchlight was such that it did not show them plainly.

The boat rocked violently, threatening to upset.

Exclamations in Spanish came from the lips of the combatants.

All at once there was a sharp cry of pain, and then one of the two toppled backward and struck the surface of the water with a splash, disappearing from view.

The other, with the torchlight showing a knife clutched in his trembling hand, leaned over the edge of the boat and peered down into the inky water, as if waiting for his enemy to rise, that he might finish the job with another stroke.

Frank and Ephraim knew they had beheld an underground tragedy, and they felt the blood rushing through their veins and their hearts fluttering.

The one who remained in the boat cried out something in Spanish, quickly flinging down the deadly knife as if he had been seized by a sudden horror for it.

That voice sounded familiar to both lads.

The boat swung round a bit, and the light of the torch shone upon the victor in such a way that they could see him distinctly.

"Gol dern my boots!" gasped the boy from Vermont. "Why, that's—that's Wand!"

"It is Juan, sure enough!" exclaimed Frank.

The occupant of the boat heard them, and he suddenly grasped the paddle, starting to paddle away.

"Juan!" called Frank.

It was the Chilian boy, and he paused, with the paddle uplifted.

"Juan!"

"Who call? Dat you, Frank?"

"Yes."

"De saints be praise! I fear it be Black Miguel! It sound-a like your voice, but I could not think-a you be here."

"I am here, and so is Ephraim. Come back."

Juan dropped the paddle into the water and turned the boat about. Then he paddled back to the shore, sprang out, and greeted them with demonstrations of unspeakable joy.

"I be 'fraid we never see each odar any more," he said. "I be 'fraid we separate for good."

"We did not expect to see you again," confessed Frank. "We could not conceive what had become of you."

"After you go the water—the waterfall—it stop to run."

"I know that."

"I cannot hear it some more, and so I go to see what the matter can be. I find it has stopped to run."

"Yes, yes?"

"Then I find the great black hole under the place where the waterfall have been. I light some matches, and I see it is the mouth of a cave. Then into it I will go, and so I do. With my matches it is able for me to get along. I find the passage, the horses, the steps, and, last, I find the lake. All this take me very long time, for I have to move slow, slow. I do not know how long I have been here, but it seem that I have been two or three day. I know it be not so, for I should have starved. But I find the lake at last, and I find the boat. I am afraid to go out on the lake—I am afraid I never get back. It is pretty bad to be lost on a lake like this, you must think. I stay here 'long time and think on what I had better to do. Then I heard somebody coming. I know not how I can hide. In the bottom of the boat I see one blanket that have been left there by somebody. It does not take me long under that to get myself, and I think perhaps I may keep still and be taken to the place where I shall find Pepita. Ha! The man—the bandit—he get into the boat. Ha! I keep all curl up under de blanket. I know he paddle de boat out-a. Bimeby pretty soon he put his foot on my hand, and his boot jam my fingers flat. I can stand it not any longer—I shall cry with de pain. I get mad-a. Then I take out my knife, jump up, and fight with de man. I take him so by de surprise dat I get de best of him. I strike



him with de knife—he fall over—he sink! Dat is de end.”

Juan had grown very excited toward the end of his story, and he was shuddering with horror when he had finished.

“Gol dern me!” cried Ephraim Gallup. “I kainder thought yeou didn’t hev no sand, but I take it all back, by thutter! Yeou’re all right, Wand!”

Frank then explained how he had been able to save Ephraim, ending by saying:

“It seems to me that we have reason to hope, for fate has aided us to a great extent, and we may yet be able to outwit Black Miguel and escape.”

“I nevar go away now till I know somethiing of Pepita,” declared Juan, fiercely. “Don’t stay with me—go, go! If you find any way to get out, go! I may die here—I expect dat!”

“Juan, we are with you. We will stand by each other to the end.”

“Gol derned ef we don’t!”

“You are very good friends—true friends! I wonder if all American boys be like you?”

“Not all, but most of them.”

“Down here we have been taught to hate the Americans. Once we thought there would be war with America. We think we are able to beat the Americans, for everybody say they are cowards all. If they be like what I have seen of them, what fools Chilians would be to try to fight them! America would be able to beat little Chili in so very short time that it would be a great astonishment.”

“There will be no war between the United States and Chili; but this is no place to talk of such things. At present we must look out for ourselves. What is to be done next?”

“The den uv the gol dern bandits is somewhere on t’other side uv this pond.”

“That must be true. But how large is this lake? That is an interesting question. The stream that flows through the valley must be the outlet of this lake. Can we find the proper landing-place of the farther shore?”

“We can try.”

“And if we get lost on the lake—what?”

“We’ll have to take aour chances on that.”

“I think you are right. I think there

are two outlets to this lake, and that the bandits are able to turn the water from one channel to the other. That would explain why the stream ceased to run through the valley, for the water had been turned into the other channel.”

“But it won’t explain ther fire that run daown the stream, or the fightin’ skeler-ton an’ demon.”

Frank laughed softly.

“Those things are easily explained.”

“Then yeou jest explain um.”

“The fire was caused by burning oil. Oil will float on the surface of the water, and a large amount must have been poured into the stream and then ignited.”

“Wal, I be gol derned! Never thought uv that, an’ I smelt oil when she was burnin’. But haow about t’other thing?”

“That was a magic lantern trick. It is likely you have seen one of these magic lantern shows that travel around through small country towns?”

“Yes, but great jee-thutter! haow could they do that air trick here? Jest yeou explain that.”

“The persons who worked the lantern were hidden in this cave, high up at one side of the valley. There must have been an opening in the wall, like a window. From that opening the figures were flung on the opposite wall.”

“An’ I was scat! Darn my eyes! But yeou ain’t told whut them thunderin’ noises was what we heard.”

“They were blasts somewhere in this cave. What they were for I cannot say.”

“Wal, hang a fool! It’s easy enough to see through things after they’re explained. I don’t know so much as a turkey gobbler!”

After a short time it was decided that they had better embark on the bosom of the lake and try to find a landing-place on the farther shore.

Frank took the paddle and the boat was sent skimming over the black water in the same direction that had been chosen by the unfortunate bandit.

After a pull of about fifteen minutes they came to the opposite shore, and before them, to their satisfaction, they saw the great opening to a passage.

They landed, and were about to proceed into the passage when Frank stopped them, saying, quickly:



"Be still! Listen!"

They listened, and, from far along the passage, sounds of voices came to them. They distinctly heard a muffled shot and wild cries. The sounds became more and more distinct, and the boys looked into each other's faces in alarm.

"Out with that torch!" hissed Frank. "We are likely to be in a heap of trouble right away! Out with the torch, I say!"

## CHAPTER XII.

### OUT TO THE LIGHT OF DAWN.

The torch was quickly extinguished.

The sounds came nearer, and the cries were hoarse and fierce.

Then there was more shooting, being this time a succession of shots.

"Into the boat!" commanded Frank. "We will row out a short distance."

"Gol dern me ef I don't think we'd better row out a thunderin' long distance!" spluttered Ephraim.

They quickly entered the boat and rowed out on the lake.

Soon glimmering lights were seen far along the passage, and then the lights revealed running figures. From these figures little flashes of fire leaped out, followed by the reports of firearms.

"Who be they shutin' at?" asked Ephraim, wonderingly.

"Somebody in advance," replied Frank.

"See—see those others who have no torches. There are two of them—no, three! See, one of them fires back! His aim was good, for down goes a torch! That is a race for life!"

"Dat be right!" came excitedly from Juan. "Look—see! One of dem dat run away be a girl I believe dat be Pepita."

"It may be!" cried Frank. "Paddle in nearer shore. If it should happen to be, we must take a hand in that business."

He clutched his rifle as he spoke, and Juan grasped the paddle and moved the boat toward the shore.

Onward came pursued and pursuers, the girl seeming to run as easily as any of them, sometimes giving assistance to one of the men. The other man, who appeared younger and livelier, now and then turned to shoot at the pursuers.

In a few moments the fugitives had reached the edge of the lake, and a cry of

despair came from them when they found the boat was not there.

"It be Pepita!" wildly exclaimed Juan—"it be my sistare!"

One of the men had turned again, snapping his revolver, which failed to go. It was empty!

The pursuers came on with savage yells.

"Hold the boat steady," directed Frank Merriwell, calmly. "I am going to do a little shooting. Juan, tell your sister and her companions to lie down."

The Chilian boy did so, speaking in Spanish. The fugitives heard, the girl gave a cry of joy, and the three flung themselves on the ground.

Then Frank Merriwell gave an exhibition of shooting that was quite astonishing. He worked his rifle swiftly, and every bullet seemed billeted.

Three of the pursuers fell with the first three shots, and the others turned in consternation and fled, bullets whistling about their ears.

"Paddle ashore," directed Frank. "This boat is large enough to hold three more. Do not lose time."

The boat was run into the shore. Juan leaped out and embraced his sister, who was nearly overcome with joy. Then one of the men, the one the girl had helped along, grasped the boy, and Juan gave a wild shout of gladness, crying, in Spanish: "My father—it is my father!"

"Don't waste time," swiftly said Frank Merriwell. "Moments are precious. Get into the boat. We must be away."

He hurried them into the boat, and they pushed out upon the lake.

"Where in thuttder be we goin'?" asked Ephraim. "Ef we go back to the valley we will be in jest as bad scrape as we was."

Then the young man who was with Pepita and her father spoke up quickly:

"I know one way to get out. Let me have the paddle. Trust to me."

"Yes, trust to Alvarez," urged Pepita.

Frank did not hesitate.

"Take the paddle," he said. "If you can get us out of this trap, you shall be well paid."

Alvarez, who was a dark, handsome young fellow, took the paddle and sent the boat forward with powerful strokes. All at once he told them to put out the



torches, and they did so, none too soon, for two shots rang out and two bullets skipped past.

Still Alvarez pulled forward through the darkness. It seemed that he paddled thus for more than thirty minutes before he would allow them to light the torches again.

"There is two channel to the stream that run from this lake—two stream," Alvarez explained. "One run through the valley. When that be turned the other run through the channel under the mountain. We must go through that channel. It is the only way to get out. We may do it all right, but nobody know about that. Nobody ever go through that way."

In a short time they came to a strip of sandy shore. Here the boat touched, Alvarez got out, told them to wait, passed round a point and disappeared. In ten minutes he came back.

"I have turn the river into the channel through the mountain," he said. "Now we try it. We may drown, we may escape. Anyway, it be better than to fall into the hand of Black Miguel."

They felt a strong current bearing them onward. In a short time they came to where a stream was pouring into a black opening. Into this opening the boat shot on its way to destruction, or to—what?

\* \* \* \* \*

It was morning, the sun was shining, and the birds were singing, when the boat came out where the stream poured from a cavern opening. The boat contained all the fugitives, and they shouted with gladness when they saw the light of day.

They had escaped, for they were no longer within the snare of the bandits. They came to the shore, and Alvarez, who knew the country, guided them to a place of safety.

Alvarez was in love with Pepita. He had been one of Black Miguel's men, but the girl had won his heart, and he had offered to save her from the outlaws. She had agreed to go with him if he would rescue her father, who was a captive in Miguel's power, the outlaw being paid for keeping him by the Marques Aguila.

The young bandit had released Senor Matias, choosing his time when he believed the outlaws were giving their entire attention to the boys in the valley.

But he had not selected a favorable moment, and the trick had been discovered. Then the bandits pursued, and the three hurried to the lake, hoping to find the boat and get away. The reader knows what followed.

Aided by friends, Senor Matias and the little party succeeded in crossing the mountains into the Argentine Republic.

But Matias declared that some day he would return and recover his property, which was a rich mine located in the outlaws' cave. This mine he had originally discovered, but the outlaws were working it, and it was the sound of their blasts that startled the boys shortly after they entered the valley of mystery.

"Aguila shall not escape me," declared Senor Matias. "I have slipped through his fingers, though he told me a hundred times that I should die a captive in my own mine. I will return, and he shall die."

"I hope somebody will kill Black Miguel," grinned Alvarez. "If he ever sees me again he will kill me."

Frank Merriwell was well satisfied with the result of his trip to Chili.

"We found your sister, Juan," he said. "We stood by each other through thick and thin, and now——"

"Now must we part?" cried the Spanish lad. "Oh, Frank, you are like to a brother to me!"

"Gol dern my punkins ef I want to leave ye!" said Ephraim, excitedly. "I'd like to travel right araound with ye, and——"

"Can't you do so?"

"Can't I? Wal, I dunno. I'll see about it. Mebby so. By gum! I will ef I kin!"

[THE END.]

"FRANK MERRIWELL'S MYSTERIOUS FOE; or, WILD LIFE ON THE PAMPAS," by the author of "Frank Merriwell," will be published in the next number (26) of the TIP TOP LIBRARY.



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